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# Soviet press favors China's efforts for economic recovery

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GENEVA, Switzerland — The chances of a complete breakdown of the Soviet economic system "within the next five years are probably better than ever," a leading U.S. expert on the Soviet Union told an international conference here yesterday.

R.V. Burke, professor emeritus of history at Wayne State University in Detroit, said the crisis for the Soviet Union will come in "an episode analogous to the crises that took place in Hungary in 1956, in Czechoslovakia

in 1968 . . . and in Poland in 1980."

He cautioned, however, that he did not mean to assert that "the existing Soviet regime may not in the end recover some form of control."

"But even in that case," Mr. Burke said, the regime's "mastery of the population will at least have been severely put to the test."

Mr. Burke made his remarks in a paper delivered to the second international congress of the Professors World Peace Academy, which began a four-day meeting to discuss "the fall of the Soviet empire."

Citing statistical data drawn from a variety of Soviet and Western sources, Mr. Burke said that the Soviet concept of centralized economic planning is at the heart of the crisis facing Kremlin leaders.

"The slowdown in the rate of economic growth which set in about 1978 will . . . provide the background" for the collapse in the Soviet socio-economic system, he said.

Western observers generally agree that the rate of increase in the Soviet gross national product has fallen from an annual average of 6 percent in the 1950s, to 5 percent in the 1960s, to 4 percent in the period from 1970-78.

Since then, said Henry Rowan, a CIA official, in testimony before the

Senate subcommittee on international trade, finance, and security economics, the Soviet GNP has stood around 2 percent.

It is the opinion of CIA analysts, Mr. Rowan said, that the forecast for the Soviet GNP will remain at that level for the remainder of the decade.

However, Mr. Burke said, private scholars argue "that per capita, there has been no increase in the Soviet Union's net material product in recent years."

That has led many Soviet experts to conclude that the Soviet economy has stopped growing altogether, he said.

The constraints on the growth in the Soviet economy has led to what Mr. Burke calls "neglect of the social infrastructure." He cited a number of bleak statistics on public health in the Soviet Union, the apparent collapse of the ability of the nation's medical establishment to deal with those problems, and a number of other serious social ailments.

Additionally, he reviewed the crisis in Soviet industrial and agricultural production, "and the biggest problem of all: a mounting shortage of energy, and indeed of raw materials generally."

Yet the question remains: How could an economy endowed with so many inherent weaknesses turn a backward, rural nation into a nuclear-armed superpower in the brief span of 58 years?

"The explanation," Mr. Burke said, "is to be found in the fact that the weaknesses of the Soviet [centrally planned economy] have been the obverse of its strengths."

"A command economy . . . enabled the Russians to neglect infrastructure for years and employ the capital thus saved to build steel mills. In short, the [Soviet economy] is an extreme form of the kind of economy a Western industrial state would develop for the purpose of waging war."

"In Soviet Russia," he said, "preparation for war, or the waging of it, has been the overwhelming concern

of the rulers of the country."

The centrally planned economy, as practiced in the Soviet Union and most of its satellite countries, guarantees that the dominant feature of life is the military-industrial complex.

But, said Mr. Burke, at its present stage of development the Soviet economy is not efficient enough to maintain "the recently achieved military equality with the United States while at the same time providing material incentives sufficient to secure the willing cooperation" of the Soviet people.

That, he said, is the prelude to disaster for the Kremlin.

Despite the efforts of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to introduce drastic reform measures, there is, according to Mr. Burke, only one alternative to complete economic collapse: a market economy.

"Mr. Gorbachev's agenda simply means more of the same," he said. What is needed, he said, is an antidote to the perilous economic stagnation.

As if social and economic problems were not enough, Mr. Burke said, the country is ruled by a "dictatorship that has begun to malfunction."

Citing the succession struggles that have characterized the transition of power in the Kremlin over the past decade, he said "the result has been a steady decline in the personal qualities" of the party general secretary.

Paralysis at the top, coupled with a new phenomenon, veto power exercised by any of the major bureaucratic establishments — such as the party apparatus, the military, the KGB security forces, and the state bureaucracy — has put the Soviet Union on the brink of severe crisis.

The key, Mr. Burke said, will be the regime's ability to reach a "modus vivendi" with the people as it struggles to come to grips with the problem within the framework of rigid ideology.

That, he said, raises the question of the stark difference between "pretense and reality," and the reality may be that the people, or the military, or both, simply have had enough of the pretense.